

BANDED CRIMINALS MAKE UP PRESENT DAY GANGS

Blackmail the Chief Object of the Organizations Which Have Been Fighting Their Battles in the Streets—The Old Time Gangs Different—Ex-Inspector Alexander S. Williams Speaks of the Evil and the Remedy

By DAVID A. CURTIS

MANY things have contributed to the growth of the gangs in New York in recent years. The automobile has been a factor in it. The reactionary influence of the new law against carrying weapons has something to do with it, experts say. The systemization of white slavery and the organization of cadets have helped it. The influx of undesirable immigration has been, if not a cause, certainly a favoring influence.

All these and more of the changed conditions of life in New York city have brought about the state of affairs which resulted in the late extraordinary outbreak of gang violence in the streets of the city. The police, smarting under criticism, are quick to assert that the

achievement by association. Their criminality is of the desperate sort, not the petty thievery and boisterous mischief that characterized the gangs of former days in New York city, but bold defiance of the law and its authority and the open purpose of levying tribute on the community. It is in this fashion that the gangs of to-day are differentiated from those of the last generation.

Of the actual details of their organization no man outside their ranks can tell much. They do not betray their secrets and seldom tell anything even about the officers and members of rival gangs. But there is no doubt that they have such organizations, well drilled and welded together by a common interest in plans of plunder.

No single member of any one of these bands is ever at a loss to command the



Cocaine
Fiend
Injecting the
Deadly Drug.

Later came the formation of neighborhood gangs, of which there have been great numbers for many years and some of which continue, after a fashion. Among them may be mentioned the Cherry Hill gang, the Jones' Wood gang, the Gas House gang and the San Juan Hill gang.

All these have offered distinctive characteristics and have given more or less trouble to the authorities, though none of them has presented any such problem as that of the Mafia or that of the organization of blackmailers which for a little while past has made such serious trouble.

The oath bound secrets of the Mafia, well known to exist, but hard to discover and the equally well guarded hidden methods of the so-called cadets and white slavers present a variety of problems which have not yet found satisfactory solutions, but which have been brought into prominence by the recent outbreak. That these modern gangs exist has been

men, who are prepared at all times to use the latest firearms. The use of the automobile is something which is usually reckoned unavailable to men of moderate means. Yet in every instance in which a weapon is needed by a member of one of these gangs he seems to be provided with one, and the records show that when it is desirable for him to make his getaway in quick order there is always an automobile at hand for his use.

A partial explanation at least of this fact has been offered by Police Magistrate Joseph E. Corrigan when he declares that many men who have been arrested and brought before him charged with various crimes ranging from pocket picking to burglary have shown him their licenses as chauffeurs as proof of their regular calling. He deduces that they are affiliated with criminals and that this accounts for the ease with which the gun men obtain the use of an automobile whenever it is desirable to have one.

He proposes that the licensing of chauffeurs should be subject to the discretion of the Police Commissioner and that good character should be a requisite to the obtaining a license. Further he proposes that if a chauffeur figures in any way in a criminal charge he should be held as a participant in the crime. And if at any time he is shown to be a crook his license should be revoked.

Few men in New York know more about gangs past and present than former Inspector of Police Alexander S. Williams. In his day his name was a terror to gangsters, and now in the enjoyment of his leisure he keeps a close watch on current events.

"The talk about the gangs of former days in this city," he said, "is mostly of the yellow covered novel kind. There were hardly any of what were called gangs in those times that were worth considering. The police broke them up almost as fast as they were formed, and even when they hung together after a fashion they were comparatively harmless."

Pell Street.



to give them the limit whenever they can be caught. But even that is criticised nowadays. I read of a Judge in Paterson who sentenced some rioters to a year in the penitentiary, and some of the business men—business men, mind you—proposed to have him impeached.

"As to the law about carrying weapons, what does it amount to? A tough can't buy a pistol in New York without having it registered. So he goes to Jersey City and buys as many as he wants."

"The cadet system is perhaps the kindest problem of all I suppose there has always been more or less of that kind of work going on, though we haven't heard so much of it until the last fifteen years or so, and it is still so much under cover that it's hard to get at and still harder to fight."

"Two things ought to be done, though, and one of them is generally done. That is to send the criminal up for the first time when he or she is caught. But the other isn't done. When a woman is taken from the street she is fined and turned out on the street again. The fine goes into the sinking fund. Think of that. Every one of those unfortunate creatures is working for the city of New York, and the city gets her wages, so she has to work harder to make up her losses. And she is fined more—the next time."

"What ought to be done is not to fine the women, but send them to a reformatory. Eighty-five per cent. of them would reform if they were sent where they had a chance to think it over and were brought under the influence of good Christian women."

"The whole question of gangs comes down to two things: The police force could prevent them from gathering together if it was allowable to use the old time methods. We used to do it, and it could be done now. That's one thing. Their organization would be much less perfect and it would be harder for them to act together if they had to dodge the police all the time."

"The other thing seems to be up to the courts, and that's the matter of dealing with the gangsters individually. The rule seems to be to give the prisoner not only the benefit of the doubt—he's entitled to that of course when there is a doubt—but he gets the benefit of every technicality that his lawyer can raise. Look at the Brandt case!"

"Say a policeman brings a prisoner to court. The lawyer objects to some of the evidence he offers, and the court sustains him. It would be convincing if they would listen to the policeman, and in a good many cases the court is really convinced, but for technical reasons the policeman can't be heard, and the prisoner goes back to his work. So it does not seem to me that the new method works as well as the old one did."

MILES OF PEAT DEPOSITS

If the deposits of coal in the United States ever become exhausted the consumer may fall back on peat, a fuel supply as yet undeveloped. It is estimated that the peat deposits in this country cover an area of at least 11,000 square miles, and that they contain the enormous total of 13,000,000,000 tons.

Peat has been in extensive use in many of the countries of Europe, notably Ireland, Holland, Germany, Russia, France and Austria, for several centuries.

In the United States peat deposits are found in the New England and other Northern States, along the Atlantic coast, in Texas, and on the Pacific coast. In parts of Massachusetts and Rhode Island may still be seen traces of abandoned peat bogs from which early Colonial settlers obtained their fuel supply. As means of transportation increased coal came into gradual use and finally caused the mining of peat to be discontinued almost entirely.

Peat is partly decomposed and disintegrated vegetable matter. Its origin is similar to that of coal, though the period of time required for its formation is considerably less. It varies in color from brown to black, and in texture is coarse and porous or light and spongy. When exposed to the air for drying it crumbles and is therefore difficult to transport for any distance unless converted into bricks.

Peat abounds only in wet or marshy lands. The beds are nearly always found just below the surface of the ground, and for that reason the cost of mining is comparatively small. No expensive machinery is required for taking it out, and there are no standing dangers as in the case of coal mining. For commercial purposes it is converted in its plastic state, into bricks by machinery. After drying in the open air for several days the bricks are ready for shipment. A ton of peat thus treated commands about half the price of a ton of coal, but it is said that even the best grade of coal has not twice the heating value of peat.

As might be inferred from its kinship to coal, peat has a number of by-products of commercial importance, such as dyes, ammonia and tanning materials. Experiments are now under way by chemists looking to the fuller development of this potential asset in the wealth of the world. As one of the natural resources of the United States peat is bound to occupy a place well to the front in years to come. It is a cheap source of heat and power, easily mined and readily changed into some safe form for transportation, and some idea of its prominence in the future commerce of the world may be gained from the fact that experts estimate its total value at \$40,000,000,000.



How a Gangster
Shoots.



Scenes
in
New
York
districts
which
are under
gang
domination



known for some time, but not even yet does any one outside of them know how large or how strong they are.

Power of the Gang.
The problems are extremely difficult. Manifestly the plans of the organization are the work of men of ability among the criminals. The details have been so well worked out and operations hitherto have been so successful that the actual leaders now have command of apparently unlimited means. Whatever money is needed either to provide the means of executing a crime or to enable the offender to escape the consequences of it appears to be ready at a moment's notice.

The Sullivan law concerning weapons evidently presents no difficulty to these

"I remember in 1874, when I was in command at the Oak street station, there was a real gang in that precinct, for it was one of the toughest in the city then. They called it the Cherry street gang and it had been a good deal talked about. You hear it mentioned even now as one of the bad gangs of the city, and I suppose it really was that. Anyhow it had such a reputation for violence that it was the custom then to send policemen out two together on their beats. It wasn't considered safe for one to go alone."

Former Police Methods.
"Well, I couldn't see the use of sending two men out together to talk politics instead of attending to duty, and I sent

according to the new order of things the police must not interfere until something happens."

"The old way was to drive out undesirable characters. I remember a man who came into my precinct once who was a prizefighter. I told one of my men to bring him in, and he found him. He had some words and the policeman knocked him down, and then brought him to the station house. I told him he'd get the same thing as long as he stayed around, and he went away."

"The new order of things is very different. Gangsters that blackmail and rob at the point of the pistol and trade on women are another sort, and the only way I know of to handle them is for the courts

Magistrates fail to uphold them in their efforts to stamp out the evil, but the root of the matter lies deeper, say men who have made a study of the matter.

Gangs and battles between gangs are no new thing in New York city. It is said that the present situation is more acute than any before known and that the outbreak is the worst on record. It is certainly bad enough, but there are those who will say that it is not as bad as things have been before.

When a private quarrel between gang leaders is sought to be settled by murder on the steps of the Criminal Courts Building in full sight of many policemen, and when prisoners continue their efforts to kill in the back rooms of the police station to which they have been taken under arrest it would seem as if a climax had been reached, but the history of the gangs of New York past and present is full of climaxes, and some have been considered as bad or worse than this, though they have been different. It is an interesting story and the latest chapter is by no means the least interesting.

The gang leaders, for there can be no gangs without captains, who are now most in the public eye differ from the average citizen far more than might be supposed if their criminal character alone is considered. The police, who certainly know more about them than anybody else, assert that they are almost without exception foreigners, or if born on American soil are the sons of immigrants. The particular war that broke out between two gangs recently was between the followers of Jack Sirocco and Jimmy Kelly, whose real name is said to be Vincenzo di Silvio, for gangsters have a curious habit of assuming ill fitting aliases, mostly Irish in sound. The general belief is that the present trouble is a small race war between Italians and Jews. This may not be entirely accurate as a line of division, but it is certain that in almost every instance in which there has been an attempt at murder the offender is known to be of foreign extraction.

There is significance in the additional fact that the gangsters of to-day are all, without exception, criminals, if not by

means of accomplishing a crime, or help that may be necessary to escape the consequences of it. Their single virtue is that they seem to be loyal to one another, even to the point of death, and a squealer among them is rare. If now and again one turns traitor he is outlawed by his fellows and extremely liable to sudden death.

There have been riots in New York that were sometimes confounded with gang work. The Astor place riots in the early half of the nineteenth century was the outbreak of jealousy on the part of the admirers of Edwin Forrest against his foreign rival Macready. But it was not the work of a gang.

The draft riots of the civil war undoubtedly offered an opportunity for some of the gangs of the city to indulge in lawless violence, but the gangs did not make the riots, nor did they play a very conspicuous part in it.

The two Tompkins Square riots, so called, were neither of them the result of anything remotely akin to gang warfare, nor did they come about through anything like gang organization.

There have been, however, disturbances in the streets that could fairly be called riots and which occurred through the clashing of rival gangs. Such a one was the historic battle between the Dead Rabbits and the Plug Uglies and the equally famous fight of the Dead Rabbits and the Bowery gang, both of which happened about the time of the war between the North and the South and both in the neighborhood of the lower end of the Bowery.

The Dead Rabbits gang was perhaps the worst of the old time gangs. It had among its members many of the criminals who infested the old Five Points and made that neighborhood one of the most unenviable slums on earth. It was commonly said to have been composed of the following of a noted politician of the time, Tom Cockey by name. Certainly he was the acknowledged leader of it in the two battles referred to. It numbered hundreds of members and was a valuable asset to a politician.

The Plug Uglies came from Baltimore,

where they ranked on about the same level in the community as the Dead Rabbits. Baltimore was at that time rabidly secessionist in sentiment, and in some way factional bitterness so added to the jealousy that existed as to the comparative notoriety of the two organizations that the Plug Uglies came in a body to New York for the express purpose of fighting, and they were accommodated.

Accounts of the battle vary and nothing was ever known of the actual losses on either side, but it was a tidy fight, though not much powder was burned. The gangs fought with clubs, stones and fists, and much blood was spilled, though the fatalities were few.

A similar encounter was the one with the Bowery gang, led by Fatty Walsh, afterward Warden of the Tombs prison. The Bowery boy of the time was a character not to be found anywhere to-day, but then a picturesque figure of New York life, distinctive enough to be presented by Chantrel, the actor, in a play written to exploit the character.

He was a dandy in dress, wearing always a red shirt, a plug hat and black trousers and usually carrying his frock coat on his arm; but fighting was one of his favorite pastimes and he almost always belonged to one of the volunteer fire companies of the city. The gang that was made up of these reckless rioters—for that is what they were almost without exception—was a formidable one, but not to be classed as criminal in any way, though fairly to be called lawless. The battle with the Dead Rabbits was hardly more than a spectacular public entertainment, though the fighting was desperate enough of its kind.

Then there were gangs with headquarters in each fire house. The rivalry between the old companies of the Volunteer Fire Department of the time was so keen that a fire turn out was frequently the occasion of a street fight. Hundreds of these outbreaks are recorded, but the fighting was almost never done with deadly weapons, and the organization of the present paid Fire Department brought about the complete extinction of all these gangs.